

FY 2005 Vermont Grassland Reserve Program (GRP) Policies (revised) 02-01-05

1) ELIGIBILITY

To be eligible for GRP in Vermont in FY 05, the land must be **privately owned**, and include a minimum of **10 acres** (as determined by FSA) of contiguous, eligible agricultural (currently used for agricultural production for hay or pasture) **“or” 20 acres** of contiguous eligible wildlife land that is **currently grassland or shrubland**.

i) “Contiguous” acres share a common field boundary, and are managed as the same unit (for example, if a road splits the farm, both sides of the road are eligible if both grasslands are managed using the same Conservation Plan).

ii) “Eligible” acres are:

(1) Existing grasslands, pasture, hayland and other areas containing grasses, forbs, and shrubs,

(2) Riparian areas,

(3) Land located in an area that historically has been dominated by grasslands and has the potential to provide habitat for animals or plants of significant ecological value if the land is retained in its current condition or restored,

(4) Incidental lands (including forestlands, wetlands, and grasslands) if managed as part of a Prescribed Grazing Plan and included for efficient administration of the agreement, provided that the total of the incidental land does not exceed 5% of the offer.

2) ENROLLMENT OPTIONS

a) Rental Agreements:

Producer Eligibility: (Owners and/or Operators (with a written long term lease for the life of the contract) are eligible for Rental Agreements of 10, 15, 20, or 30 years in length.)

(1) Participant receives 100% of the County Level GRP Rental Rate per acre for each year of the agreement as per the GRP Fiscal Year 2004 Rental Rates.

b) Easements:

Producer Eligibility: (Only Owners that can provide clear title are eligible for Easements) 30 year or Permanent Easements are available.

(1) **30 year Easement** participants receive 30% of the Appraised Fair Market Value minus the Grazing Value of the property as determined by a Certified Land Appraiser.

(2) **Permanent Easement** participants receive 100% of the Appraised Fair Market Value minus the Grazing Value of the property as determined by a Certified Land Appraiser.

c) Restoration Agreements are available **in conjunction with** a Rental Agreement or Easement.

Restoration cost-share is available for offers in need of grassland improvements.

(1) For offers on land that has been cultivated in the past, **75% ****is available in restoration cost-share in FY 2005,

(2) For offers for the purpose of grassland enhancement, **75%** is available in cost-share in FY 2005.

Eligible practices include:

Pasture and Hayland Planting (512)

Brush Management (314),

Upland Wildlife Habitat Management (645-only where associated with grassland birds),

Fence (382—cost-share only eligible when used for Use Exclusion (472), and perimeter fencing as part of a Prescribed Grazing System (528A) limited to the extent needed for the minimum acres for the existing animal units)

Use Exclusion (472),

Prescribed Grazing (528A),

Pumping Plant for Water Control (533)

Spring Development (574)

Watering Facility (614)

Well (642) (Restricted to livestock watering use)

Stream Crossing (728)

Pipeline (516)

Grassed Waterway (412)

Animal Trails and Walkways (575),

Underground Outlet (620).

Riparian herbaceous buffer (390)

Riparian forest buffer (391)

Livestock Shade Structure (717) (Must be an integral part of a grazing system)

3) PERMISSIVE USES:

a) Grazing

Grazing is allowed according to an NRCS-approved Conservation Plan, including maintenance And necessary cultural practices consistent with maintaining the viability of the grassland.

(1) Must exclude livestock from sensitive areas (forested, scrub shrub and emergent (where additional resource concerns exist) wetlands, and perennial streams.)

b) Haying, Mowing, and Harvesting for Seed (referred to as haying/mowing)

Haying/Mowing is allowed as follows:

Cool season grasses:

(1) For **grazed** acres: on all cool season grass fields that are included in the Prescribed Grazing Plan as part of the normally-grazed or hayed acres in a grazing plan no harvesting restrictions. (This includes grassland only in a grazing rotation) **MUST MEET 528A standard.**

- (2) Haying and seed harvest, are NOT permitted on 20 percent of offered cool season acres during the primary nesting season. (Harvesting permitted after July 15)
- (3) For Warm season grass sites: **no more than 1/3** of these acres may be hayed/mowed or grazed **during the primary nesting season**. (Harvesting permitted after July 15)

Additional Requirements:

1. **Haying** - No mowing prior to August 15 on sites with identified habitat for threatened or endangered species; plant or animal.

2. **Grazing** – Must exclude livestock from sensitive areas (wetlands, perennial streams, and farm ponds)

Access to streams and ponds for watering sites will require site plan review by an NRCS designated conservationist. First option should be water systems away from sensitive areas.

4) PROHIBITED USES:

Conservation Plan and Contract Development

The conservation plan will address all offered/contract acres. Each paddock/hayland field in the conservation plan will be identified as either predominately warm season or cool season species. The conservation plan will address nesting season restrictions as follows:

a) Hay or Seed Production:

On grassland used for hay only, seed production, or wildlife habitat, **NO** haying, mowing, or seed harvest will be allowed on 20 percent of the grassland acres during the primary nesting season. This season begins on May 1 and ends July 15. This is needed to maintain habitat value for several ground nesting birds and small game that are in declining numbers across the state. The program restricts practices that would destroy the grassland community such as the production of crops, fruit trees, and vineyards.

b) Ground Disturbing Activity:

Any other activity that would **disturb the surface of land, except** for appropriate land management activities included in the Conservation Plan for the management of the grassland are prohibited.

5) FISCAL YEAR 2005 SELECTION PROCESS:

GRP applications will be selected for funding based on a State-Developed Ranking System.

In Fiscal Year 2005, GRP will focus on the following National priorities as described in the “Notice of Availability of Program Funds for the Grassland Reserve Program”:

- a) Grasslands under the greatest threat of conversion to non-agriculture and other agricultural uses,
- b) Existing Grazing Operations,
- c) Biodiversity of Plants and Animals.

In addition, the National GRP Manual has directed states to encourage the following:

- a) At least 55 percent of the ranking points must be for conversion risk,
- b) Establish Ranking Criteria that do not require a field visit,
- c) Existing Grasslands,
- d) Applications that do not require Restoration Cost-Share,
- e) Location significance,
- f) Operation and Maintenance requirements,
- g) Likelihood the site will retain its grassland and habitat functions and values,
- h) Partnership Contributions.

***Vermont has requested authorization to reduce the acreage requirement from 40 contiguous acres to parcels of 10 or more acres.*

Ranking worksheets will be completed for each Field Office and sent to the Assistant State Conservationist for Programs by the ranking deadline. Each application will be recorded on the ranking worksheet and include: County name, Applicant name, Tract number, Limited Resource Farmer designation, Beginning Farmer designation, Offered acres, Length in years of rental or easement application, Score, and Total Dollars.